PC Format

Collector's Series Volume Seven

Under scrutiny: the new wave of PC games from Europe's leading independent publisher.

Presented free with the January 1997 edition of *PC FORMAT*

Contents

Blimey. Gremlin has loads of PC games scheduled for release next year, and here we present ten of the best...

Welcome...

Hello and a warm welcome, dear reader, to the world of Gremlin Interactive. The Sheffield-based firm has come a long way from its roots. Originally founded as just a spin-off from a computer store, owned by Gremlin Chairman, Ian Stewart, the company was in its early days synonymous with a certain Monty Mole character. He was followed years later by ant-type Ninja beast Zool. And since then, well, the company has never looked back.

This supplement reveals the very latest software to come from the still-independent publishing house. We start off with a look at its biggest game of the year *Realms of the Haunting,* a horror extravaganza. Turn to page 16 for our report on the making of *Sand Warriors* – the Ancient Egyptian-style flight combat simulator. Then, starting on page 20 we bring you a four-page report on the now-released *Fragile Allegiance,* a space strategy and trading game. We go off-road on page 24 with *Hardcore 4x4,* load up with *Reloaded* on page 26 and bring you the hard word on *HardWar* on page 28.

We close with a report on the next wave of games from the *Actua Sports* division of Gremlin – tennis, football management, soccer action and golf are all featured on page 30. Enjoy!

Realms of the Haunting

Realms of the Haunting is the most ambitious game Gremlin Interactive has ever created. It tells a tale spanning centuries and takes in three game genres; puzzle, movie and action. We asked Paul Green, the game's designer to set the scene...

Where did you first get the idea for *Realms of the Haunting*?

The inspiration for *Realms* came from two levels. First was the engine and its creator Tony Crowther. He originally came to Gremlin nearly three years ago with the aforementioned splendiferous engine and said, "What can we do with this?" It was Tony's idea to use the horror genre, despite Gremlin expressing the view that true horror could not be achieved. How wrong we all were. We agreed we could make people jump, so when I was drafted in to actually design the story, characters and locales I had to dig deep. Drawing from that deepest dark entity which some people would call my soul (loosest sense of the word) I etched the idea out briefly. Gremlin instantly went for it. The ideas in *Roth* come from legend, magic, religion and theology – with a little artistic license thrown in to pull it all together and render it believable.

How long did you spend actually researching the game?

Research time was kept down to a bare minimum. Most of what I'd scribbled at that point had come from reading, listening and role-playing and if you'd seen it then, you'd never have guessed we were facing a hit almost three years later. Little or no research was needed – I'd got it all up here [points to head] already stored, ready to be cleaned up and categorised.

Realms of the Haunting is a game with a deep, layered history. How much of it is actual investigation into true folklore and how much is invention?

Folklore, legend, religion and history do make up almost all of the story but it was the fantasy element which needed to be employed for conventions which pulled all that loose information together. The demons are not based upon any magic or legend; except in a few cases like Belial who's mentioned in that heavily edited and religious book about probably the most misinterpreted guy who ever lived – what's it called... oh yes, the Bible. We've tried to explain to the *Roth* player that demons come from within, they are found inside you, that little piece of envy which dribbles out and ruins everything, that hatred which can really manifest into reality. Anyway, the demons in *Roth* manifest, but they're shadows of someone's personality, and that's what magic's really all about – shadows and perception; if you believe in something that much, if your strength, personality and belief are that strong, well... considering there are some real evil Souls knocking about in Roth you can be sure there's going to be some really deep Shadows.

All of the folklore the player reads from Roth is true English folklore. Most of it's Cornish as Helston's in Cornwall. As for the Templars, well, we know they exist or rather did exist but again their existence was probably most misunderstood when you're reading into the Grail legends and reasons for being in Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades. We know they did exist; look at England's St. John's Ambulance – they're a descendant Society of one of their Orders. I could go on here you know...

What do you personally feel about all this Seven Seals of the Apocalypse stuff?

The *Roth* story heavily focuses on the Biblical theories of the Apocalyptic Seven Seals. When these are broken God will rage bloody war on Earth against another of one the most isunderstood characters in legend – Big D; did he fall or was he merely following orders? Whatever I feel about all this stuff you cannot ignore the fact that the number seven is one of the most magical numbers in creation (according to various texts, not my personal view). The Seals in *Roth* are an extension of the Seven Seals in Lore. Are they tied to the Earth in some magical way? Are they in fact the seven states your Soul must ascend through to reach Nirvana – something similar to what the Templars were apparently trying to keep hidden with the Grail? Did they search for the Grail as a cup or were they 'ascending' through the lands in a 'meditational' aspect to locate the 'Way' – the 'Grail', which had become lost? Who knows – but isn't it great to speculate? And that's what *Roth* can be for anyone who cares to look
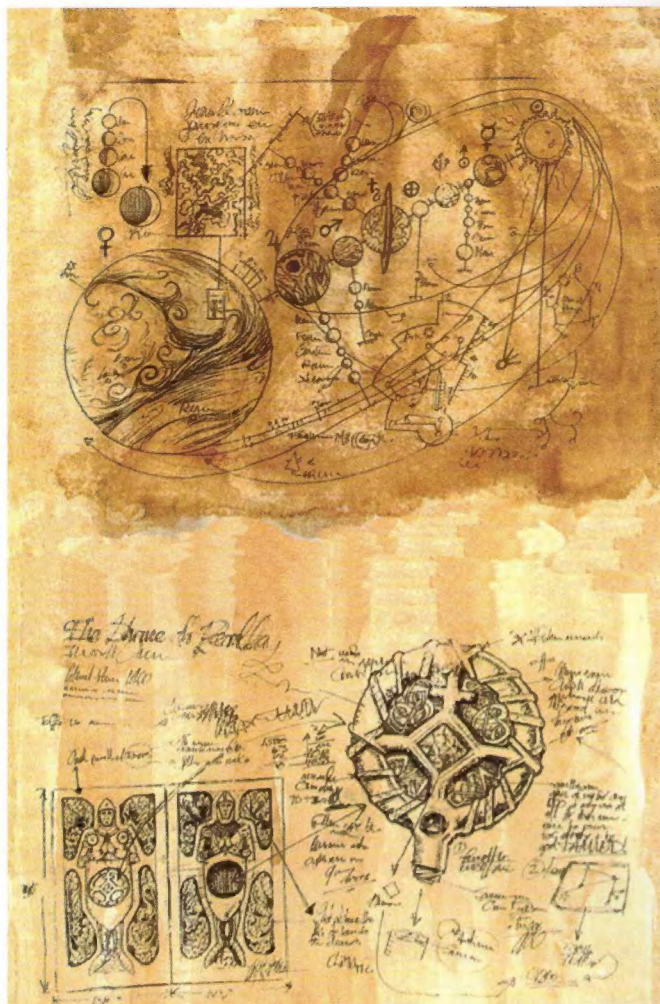
You pick up this old diagram of the shrive along the way.

A high res version of one of the paintings that adorns the walls in the manor house.

Just one of the many gloriously detailed stained glass windows you'll see.

close enough – a vehicle for supposition and what if.

All the action in *Realms* takes place in the Cornish village of Helston – is this a place that actually exists, and if it is, then how do the local residents' committee feel about the way their home town is being represented?

Yes, Helston does exist, and no, I've no idea how the local residents' committee will feel about the way their home is being represented. There's nothing I've written which could possibly cause offence. It's good publicity anyway. There are no slurs upon Helston – all I've written about the town is fact according to one source or another. I believe it's quite a picturesque little place full of charming people – my girlfriend's mother has just returned from a holiday there; she has friends living close-by. No reports of demons or murders I hear.

In *Realms* you get to visit the Plane of Heaven – how did you conceive what that could look like?

The Plane of Heaven we depict in *Realms* is only one of the seven heavens depicted in the mythology I've followed. Its description comes from first-hand

accounts of 'spiritual' journeys. The plane is not meant to depict the Christian Heaven, rather one of the seven mentioned above and we do not call it Heaven or even a heaven; it's the Divine Realm where Michael reigns. Real or fantasy we're not sure, but that sure is some trip, eh?

The player character Adam Randall's fate seems sealed the moment he enters his father's old Manor House – as a bit-part in a much larger story. How much of that is based on the idea of a pre-determined destiny and how much on the linear nature of computer games?

The idea of a predetermined destiny for the character was initialised from the onset and early detailing of the design and story. Yes, the end result's the same, it always will be, but the paths the player takes on the way there are many and varied. Computer games are linear no matter what people say; you start at one point and the whole idea is to finish the game at another. It's like life. We're all born, we all die. It's the bit in the middle that's the attraction.

You chose to incorporate an action element into the proceedings – how

much of this was necessitated by the trend in PC games for *Doom*-style playability?

We incorporated an action element into *Roth* yes, and some of it was necessitated by the current trend in PC games because of the 'very nature' of the engine. We asked 'What can this engine do? What do we want to do with it? And can we improve on it as the production continues?' You can see if you play it what the engine can do, you can see what we've done with it, and yes, it developed in production, so much so that in certain areas we re-addressed the design to take into account the new and varied opportunities which were presented to us.

Where did the images come from for the Demons you fight?

The demons came from imagination, both mine, Les Spink (designer) and artists Berni and Ira. They're a bit stylised, a bit Manga I suppose; that's my fault… I'll come quietly.

Isn't it the case that you really just wanted to do a game about demons?

Oh, go on then, yes!

A potted history...

Confused by all this talk of the Seven Seals and alternate realms? Then just read this...

The storyline for *Realms of the Haunting* is devastatingly complex. We tried to summarise it in about 450 words and ended up with this dreadful compromise. It's far from complete, cuts out most of the cameo characters, and you won't need to know it to play the game – since documents you discover and people you meet along the way will fill you in – but we thought we'd tell you what all the fuss was about anyway!

A long time ago

Once upon a time, there was a French man called Claude Florentine. He made his living as a Knight Templar in Syria. Florentine's evil thoughts created a Demon called Belial, who subsequently tempted the once-human Knight to sell his soul to the dark side.

Florentine and Belial were on a mission to bring the Devil onto the Earth. To achieve a physical form for Lucifer, before the power of God. And hence bring about the Apocalypse. Their tool to this end is called the Soulstone – a device that could channel Man's thoughts and turn them into what peasants once called Angels and Demons. The entrance to the Soulstone was located in England, so that's where Belial and Florentine went.

Of course there was a catch. You can't bring about the Apocalypse just like that, can you? The problem was that the gate to the Soulstone was locked by the seven menhurs (stones a bit like Stonehenge) coded with Seals. Breaking the Seals would unlock the key to the Abyss, also known as the Shrive which would then free Satan. Easier said than done, however, because each Seal would

take about a century to crack. And that was after an epic battle with the Falshire Knights who defended the stones. Seeing as the Seals would take so long to break, Florentine was granted eternal life.

Roll with it

The centuries rolled on until there was only one Seal left to be broken. That rather forced the issue between Belial and Florentine over who would get to free the big D. and hence curry his favour. The former comrades parted company and both independently went their own way trying to put the final pieces of the jigsaw into place. The big problem they both still faced was how to recover the Shrive, a magical sword hilt and key to freeing the Devil. Neither of them could touch the shrive and so needed a third party to recover it.

All that's the history and now to explain why you, as Adam Randall get involved. Adam's father Charles Randall was the parson of Helston – a quiet Cornish village and spookily the home of the Seven Seals. Charles, discovers the old house, build by Belial and friends over the Seals, but is silenced forever – he becomes tied to the Soulstone and made Belial's servant. Belial visits Adam and gives him the Seals. This causes a series of dreams, and draws Adam to the old house where Charles met his fate.

Arriving at the house, the game is a race against time. You're trying to find the Sword of St Michael (the other half of the Shrive), smash the last seal and stop the Apocalypse. Belial and Florentine are competing – both trying to be first to free Satan. The fate of mankind is in your hands. Now it starts to get complicated...
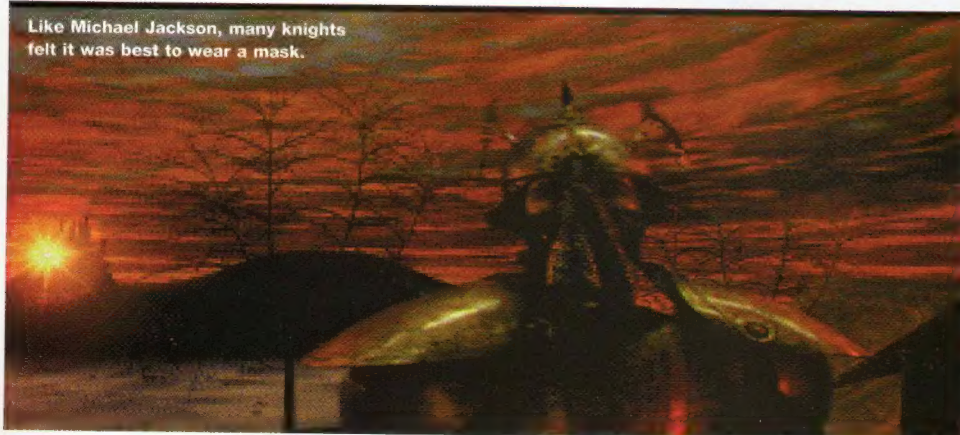

The stained glass window images were painted, then digitised to be placed on the walls.

All Hell's breaking loose as the Automotons stray outside the manor.

Like Michael Jackson, many knights felt it was best to wear a mask.

The fate of mankind is in your hands.

Top tip: whenever sitting in suspicious chairs, never use the arm rests. "You won't get me in that thing again!"

The Movie

Meet Bright Light Studios, the team bringing you the cinematic element in Realms of the Haunting.

Interactive movies have got something of a bad name amongst the PC press. And with good reason too. The genre came very quickly to typify Hollywood's worst efforts on its very worst days. While Gremlin would be insane to lump *Realms* with the point and snore, branching video game boom, brought about by CD-ROM, there's definitely stacks of video to spool on those four discs *Roth* comes on.

To the rescue

Enter stage left Bright Light Studios on a mission to make the movie segues in *Realms of the Haunting* as entertaining as the in-game puzzling and action. So, first up a bit of background. Bright Light's heritage is closely tied in with the career of managing director and horror special effects supremo Tom Lauten. He's worked on the likes of *Nightmare on Elm Street 4*, *Poltergeist 3*, *Star Man*, *Night Breed*, the *War of the Worlds* TV series, *Toxic Avenger* and *Class of Nukem High*! Bright Light Studios has been running for four years and works as a production

utility and special effects unit with blue and green screen filming areas. Recent work includes a computer animation for the BBC's *Total Reality* show and full size props and mock-ups for Games Workshop exhibitions. In fact they do an awful lot of business with Games Workshop. On the interactive games side they're also involved with Mindscape, on visuals for games like *Dark Crusader* and voice-overs for *Shadow of the Horned Rat*.

PC Format interviewed Art Director Mark Bedford, and the opening question we asked him was how did he go about making *Realms* feel different to traditional interactive movies? "Firstly we used a professional, broadcast quality camera, rather than doing it on film or Hi-8. We got loads of original reference materials from the guys at Gremlin. They supplied us with tons of storyboards, text out of books and stuff like that to show how the game should feel. We tend to aim for realism in the quality of stuff like armour. Imagine how rusty armour might look, instead of bright, shiny, pre-rendered *Excaliber*-style stuff."

Traditionally, PC game cinematics are shot with actors in front of blue back-drops. The authentic backgrounds are then added in the post-production phase. Using blue screens is pretty much standard in even high end feature films, but games have classically got the effects

wrong. Sadly, actors often never look integrated enough into the proceedings. Like they are in fact reading their lines in a studio, in front of a blue sheet, oblivious to what could be going on behind them. The problem has always been with the actor's suspension of disbelief, which obviously had dreadful implications for the viewer!

Lateral thinking

To get around this problem Bright Light employed some lateral thinking. As Mark Bedford explained; "Gremlin provided us with test backgrounds of the computer footage so that we could see how the actor would match up in the early stages of production. That way we knew the way in which each actor could react to the scene rather than just filming against a blue and putting it in afterward." The usage of a gadget called an Ultimatte along with a betacam recorder meant that they could split the signal from both of the cameras and simultaneously record the blue screen image to tape, and create a rough edit. "We could see how it looked straight away."

So the producer would know what was going on, but how did Bright Light create atmosphere for the actors to react to? Bedford again; "They did a run through looking at monitors, seeing the backgrounds and getting a rough idea of where they were."

"We tend to aim for realism in the quality of props."

The casting couch

No, this grotesquely deformed actor wasn't cast by an over-zealous equal opportunities board.

Although Rebecca is by your side for much of the game, you can hear but not see her when in first person mode.

The star Adam Randall gets all the best dialogue. At one point he even tells a priest to "Blow it out of his..."

The recent game from Origin, *Wing Commander IV*, took a step back in time and placed its actors into real sets. *Realms of the Haunting* offers no such solace, with almost entirely digitised background. Rather smartly, Gremlin used the same bitmaps and files for the ingame graphics as the rendered back-grounds, neatly blurring the join between first-person action and third-person views of Adam Randall. Bedford was keen to point out however that, "We actually did some live action filming at the Coventry Museum of British Road Transport. The taxi-cab scene at the start of the game was filmed in real cab. It was the oldest taxi in England... and what's more I was the driver."

Also, not all the special effects were generated solely digitally. Bedford notes one effect where, "We had an actor pulling a zombie's head off. We told him there was going to be a special effect but didn't tell him how much dust and debris he was going to get covered in. He was pretty startled!" On shoots you might think that the digital nature of the work make things easier. You could always just promise that you'll touch up work in post-production. Bedford is adamant that this isn't the case. "On shoots we always tried to make everything to the best first go. That actually saves a lot of time with the costly post production work."

The film shoot for *Realms* took about six weeks to complete. On the subject of production budget, Bedford chose his words carefully. "Our budget was... modest. Nothing like the millions of pounds lavished on the *Wing Commander* games. We had the canteen fund and cab fare from *Wing Commander*." Jokes aside, Bedford emphasised that "We finished on-time and on budget!"

Lighting effects were used at the shooting stage in the studio, even though they could, and were, also added afterwards in post-production.

"We had an actor pulling a zombie's head off!"

Some tricks – like when this character lights a match from nowhere – don't depend on technology.

Postcards fr

Don't be fooled by the game's initial gentile atmosphere. A whole lot of evil bubbles within...

E ven as *Roth* begins and you find yourself wandering through the manor hallways, you'll see doors daubed with strange symbols, spooky pictures of immortal men and paintings with eyes that follow your every move. You really should take this as a signal that all is not well. *Realms* quite literally takes you to Hell and back. Among the many locations you'll explore are Ancient Egypt, mausoleums, corridors full of human skeletons, an armoury, a tower in an alternative dimension, an ancient cottage, a room full of fountains, a topiary maze, an old church and a spooky vicarage. Here are some of the postcards we sent back.

The first time you fire the pistol you'll love its chunky feel. The second time it's pretty cool. Come the tenth time and you'll curse it as you notice the delay between loading the cartridge and cocking the weapon.
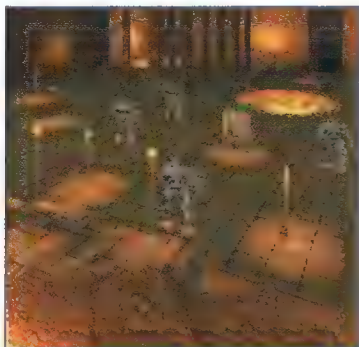

"What the Hell!" Say hello to the first of many Urges you'll be meeting.

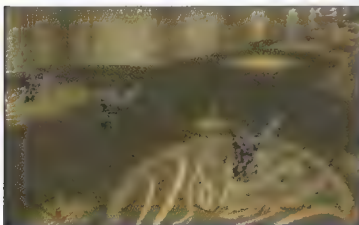An arboretum floating in the sky in one of the Realms.

om the edge

You've got to tiptoe down those steps. Best wipe out those automatons first.

Did you remember to bring your hymn book? The crucifix makes a late appearance.

A gloriously rendered old vicarage. Do you think it's haunted?

Check out the detailed textures on the floor. They're on ceilings too!

On no accounts turn your back on this beastie. Not even if it's just to run away!

Roth down the ages...

Here's a full background on the events taking place before Realms of the Haunted begins...

12,000 BC
The Soulstone is cast into Hell and the gate of the Abyss is formed from the Soulstone. The Soulstone creates the Power called Abaddon. Abaddon becomes the Keeper of the key of the Abyss (the Shrive) and in his inception the seven Seals of the Gate to the Abyss are bound to time.

3 000 – 300 BC
Druids use the stones as a place of pagan worship.

1264 AD
Claude Florentine born in Lyon, France. The Power of Belial takes form at Florentine's birth.

1291 AD
Belial first contacts Florentine at Krak des Chevaliers in Syria.

1294 AD
Florentine arrives at the stones.

1316 AD
Initiation of the Temple of the Morning Star. It is their intention to destroy the Seven Seals in order to open the Gate to the Abyss and call upon Satan's power. Thus, the Power of Satan can take a physical form on Earth before the Power of God.

1336 AD
The Tower is located by Florentine. The Lesser Power of Galziel is formed. The first Stone and Seal of Abaddon are broken by the Temple. Florentine removes the Shrive from the Soulstone. The Temple burns to the ground due to traps set in the Seals. Florentine survives with the aid of the Belial. The Shrive disappears, taken by Aelf (St. Michael) who divides the two pieces. He deposits the top piece in the Temple under the house and the sword in his keep on the Realm of Aqua. Florentine learns of the Gardeners, the keepers of the Tower and the Seals. The Watchers – Gaul and Hawk – wake as the sword is removed from the Soulstone and begin their separate journeys in quest for the Abyss.

1420 AD
The second stone and Seal of Abaddon are broken. The Temple burns down once again when the Second Seal is broken. Florentine survives. Florentine and Belial go to Israel to find a device that will halt the fires.

1431 AD
Florentine meets with the Powers known as Fecor and Anarazel in the ruins of Krak des Chevaliers and they head for the Carpathians where they hope to find the elusive device.

1490 AD
The Mirror of Solomon is located. Florentine pays a visit to Madrid to find papers on the Tower, then goes to the Temple of the Morning Star.

1521 AD
The Power of Abaddon is conjured into the Mirror. Abaddon is forced to tell Florentine of the traps within the Seals on the Stones.

1529 AD
The third stone and Seal of Abaddon are broken. The Power of Vine appears at the temple.

1666 AD
Florentine chairs the Grand Meeting of Magicians in London. The Power of Pyrichiel is summoned causing The Great Fire of London. The fourth stone and Seal of Abaddon broken.

1670 AD
The evil of Florentine's mind creates the Lesser Power of the Dodger.

1672 AD
The Dodger escapes into the Tower.

1673 AD
Attempts to find the Dodger begin.

1783 AD
The fifth Stone and Seal of Abaddon broken. Florentine learns that the Dodger is able to control the Ire. The Temple sends in Yielders and Urges to locate the Dodger but they fail.

1895 AD
After unsuccessful attempts to kill the Dodger, the Power of Belial informs Florentine that the Gardeners may have returned to the Tower. American Temple member James Jonson is killed after locating an entrance to the Tower. His family perish in the fire. The Temple are attacked by the Dodger and the Ire as they try to move the Mirror.

1912 AD
Florentine summons the Powers of the Slanderers to guard the Temple grounds. Hawk arrives at the Temple but is captured by Belial and bound in chains through the neutral Power called Raysiel by Florentine's will. Hawk is incarcerated in an 'otherworldly' jail, the entrance to which is behind the sarcophagus in the Study.

1929 AD
The homes of the richest members of the Temple are guttered in a series of fires. Florentine blames the Dodger. The Temple abduct six women for the sacrificial breaking of the sixth Seal and stone of Abaddon. The sixth stone is broken. Belial escapes the Temple with the six pieces of the Seals from the Chamber of the Soulstone and flees to the catacombs of St. Michael's.

UP TO PRESENT DAY
Charles Randall discovers the house, but is silenced forever and tied to part of the Soulstone. Charles becomes Belial's servant. Belial finds Adam Randall's address and arranges a visitation to give him the Seals. Their proximity begins a change in the Adam's soul. He has visions and is drawn to the house. Charles Randall reaches out with his soul and 'taps; into Rebecca Trevisard who tries to contact Adam through dreams. Adam and Rebecca arrive at the house at more of less the same time. Belial and Florentine work independently on the same aims. The Temple wants to use Adam to find the Shrive and Sword, then use him to smash the last Seal. Belial and Florentine both want to be the one to free Satan. Within the last Seal lies the very heart of the Soulstone. But where are the Shrive and the Sword, the artefacts that can save or destroy mankind? Can Adam find them before Belial or Florentine, and will he be able to banish the Power of Satan? The final episode begins...

Who's Who

Meet your new family members with our Who's Who guide to Realms of the Haunting. They're very colourful characters...

▶ Gremlin chose a Manga look for the conceptual art – essentially because it was Paul Green's style. Here's an early, glam-rock Aelf.

A s well as all the computer-generated and drawn beasties that stand in your way, *Realms* also features nine cast members, whom you see and engage in dialogue with, six secondary cast members, whom you only encounter in voice-overs and three other protagonists whom you bump into in animated form.

Here we present character studies of six main players, along with a behind-the-scenes treat – a glimpse of some of the original artwork used to define the characters. As you can see, there was originally a very strong Manga feel to the game, which helped style the casting but never made an actual appearance in the game.
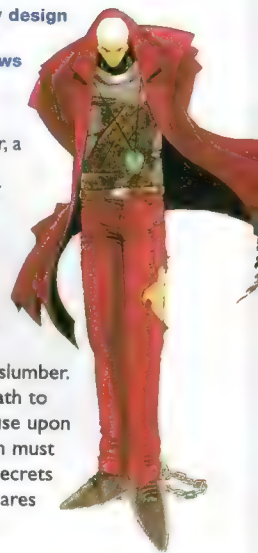
ADAM RANDALL

Adam's the hero of the game and the character you control. With his father, the Pastor at St Michael's in Cornwall, recently deceased, Adam is plagued at night by obscure dreams and nightmares. When a so-called friend of his father delivers a mysterious package to his London apartment, Adam's nightmarish visions increase ten-fold. Inside the box Adam discovers the fragments of some age-old devices; wax seals inscribed with the same designs frequenting the pastoral surrounds of many a farmer's field.

Feeling a pull to his late father's parish, Adam unwittingly enters the realm of the 600-year-old Order of the

▶ This early design for Charles Randall shows a tortured character.

Morning Star, a Hell-bound collection of miscreants whose only goal is to release their Master from his 11,000-year slumber. Treading a path to the dark house upon the hill, Adam must unravel the secrets of his nightmares face-to-face.

CHARLES RANDALL

Main characteristic: dead – but not, alas, at rest. Charles Randall is, or was, Adam's father, and the reason why Adam has come to this house (he has had terrible dreams of his father in torment). Randall senior was the local preacher in Hellston, and became disturbed by the terror emanating from the house. When he investigated, he discovered 'something awful' and died. His soul was captured by Belial and tied in some way to the Soulstone; thus Adam is striving not only to save the world but also to put his father's immortal spirit to rest.

Charles Randall appears as an elderly Causasian man, tall but stooped, his face drawn both by the agony he is undergoing and the knowledge that torments him. His ankles are chained and he has an amulet round his neck – the symbol of his imprisonment. He

◀ This concept for Rebecca was replaced by one with stockings right to the top.
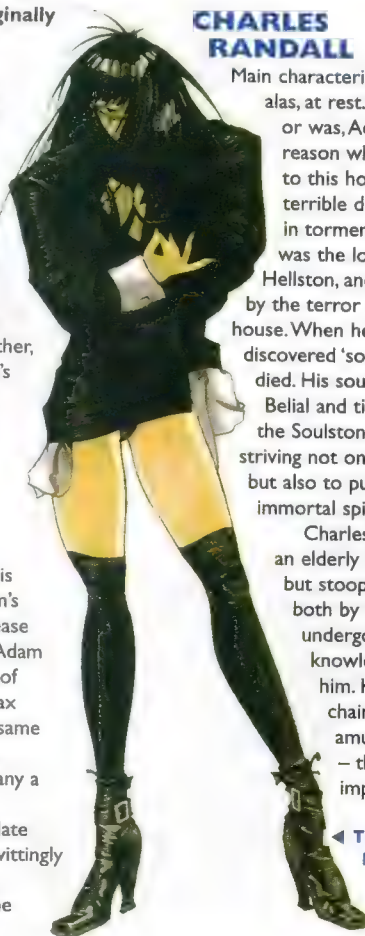
◄ Each time you meet Claude Florentine he appears in different outfits – taken from various historical eras.

appears increasingly tortured – mentally, spiritually and physically.

CLAUDE FLORENTINE

The evil genius of Roth. Ex-Templar, sometime alchemist and demonologist, all-round baddie, pictures of Florentine at various points in history litter the house. This is the man who sold his soul in return for demonic assistance in acquiring and destroying the Seven Seals, to unbalance the Soulstone and deliver the world into the hands of Lucifer. Presumably he hopes to gain by this transaction. To this end Florentine has robbed, murdered, tortured and betrayed friends, enemies and innocent passers-by for most of the last millennium. He is now more than a little unhinged. Well, to be strictly honest, he was none too sane to begin with and is now a screaming megalomaniac.

He appears as a mature man, somewhat haggard, with a fanatical/fiendish glint in his eyes. He has a rather oily voice and the slightest hint of a French accent.

◄ This New Age concept for Rebecca was dropped in favour of the darker, moodier character on the facing page. Good choice.

REBECCA TREVISARD

Main characteristic: psychic. Rebecca is Adam's indispensable sidekick, whom he meets at the house. She is a valuable source of information for Adam as her past education and brain powers will testify. Adam has dreamed of Rebecca. But can he trust her? She tells him she too was called to the house; called by Adam's father to aid his son in his time of need. Rebecca is tall, long-legged, with dark hair and a mysterious yet personable personality; but does she have an ulterior motive for her presence? When Rebecca says the truth behind it is all in the Stars, well, she just might be right.

AELF

This chap is something of a mystery. Unquestionably on the side of the angels – and indeed Adam's principle informant – he is plainly a Power, and equally plainly was once a human Knight. It is possible that he is in fact the Archangel Michael taking a hand in human affairs. His main tasks are to guide Adam to four items – a sword, a helm, gauntlets and a cuirass – which will aid him in the quest, and to give useful information, in particular the location of the two parts of the Shrive, the object needed to re-balance the Soulstone and save the world. Aelf still looks something of the flower of chivalry he was as a mortal, but probably taller and more impressive.

◄ Belial's a bit of a dandy – a winner of hearts. Relax girls, he's married... to the Devil!

BELIAL

Many centuries ago, Florentine signed a pact with Belial, who has been his (more or less) loyal servitor ever since. However, even Florentine would be wise not to turn his back on this one for too long, for Belial is one of the great Lords of Hell and whatever game Florentine thinks he's playing, Belial is certainly playing a deeper one. Unimaginably ancient, unbelievably devious, unutterably cruel – but also urbane and charming when he needs to be – Belial has many guises. Mostly we see him in his 'well-dressed thug' persona, a handsome devil in Armani suits and Gucci shoes, with only the occasional glint of red in the eyes to betray his Hellish origins.

◄ Early sketches had Belial appearing as a monster, as well as his human form. This evolution was later dropped.

A devil in Armani suits and Gucci shoes

Meet Gaul – a soulless shell. His role in the game is to act as a vessel for his master's shell in the final days. You don't meet him until near the end of Roth.

Tooled up

Have a look into Adam Randall's armoury. There's certain to be a weapon to your combat tastes.

T he control mechanism in *Realms of the Haunting* is both intuitive and easy to use. It makes the best of the mouse and keyboard. Directional movement is handled via the cursor keys, with all the usual move, strafe and run options, while for more sophisticated hands-on tasks you move the mouse.

Using the on-screen mouse pointer has several key advantages. For starters, it makes for accurate weapon aiming. Rather than the classic *Wolfenstein 3D* targeting system, where to point a weapon you need to move your entire body, the pointer controls the mark of your fire-power. Adversaries aren't just mowed down – they have weak points which you'd do well to hit.

Having a mouse cursor on the screen raises the level of interactivity. Whereas in *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* you run over ammunition to collect it, in *Realms of the Haunting* you actually need to click on it to add it to your inventory. Boxes of shells or bullets slide to the bottom of the screen with a neat, tactile papery rustle. On top of that, the pointer's useful for puzzle solving. As you're not just collecting keys and tripping switches, you need ways to combine objects. In one puzzle, for instance, you require an orb to open a door. You get the orb and spot a locked gate with an indentation. Pop the orb in and Belial's your uncle! The inventory screen is also essential for utilising power-ups – you actually need to use the power-ups, making very little of *Roth* simply automatic. There's no automap feature, so when reading the various maps you find, you need to search for objects and landmarks to determine your location, just like in real life.

Adam Randall is quite nippy with his fists, but the first proper weapon you come across in the game is a handgun. Straight away you'll find that the kit feels just right. But it's not without its traumas. With only nine bullets in each clip, the fiddly reloading procedure on the Colt can be painful – especially in the heat of battle.
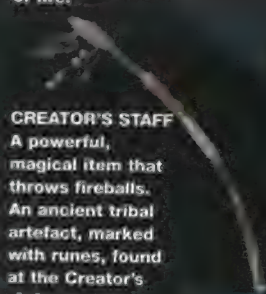
Adam Randall is quite nippy with his fists.

Weapons both magical and modern
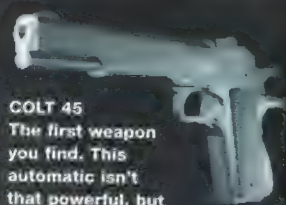
COLT 45
The first weapon you find. This automatic isn't that powerful, but ammunition is plentiful and it boasts a rapid rate of fire.
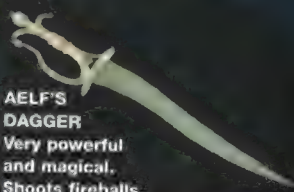
SHOTGUN
Winchester 12-gauge shotgun. Holds six shells but reloads quickly. More powerful than the Colt 45 with plentiful ammunition.

CREATOR'S STAFF
A powerful, magical item that throws fireballs. An ancient tribal artefact, marked with runes, found at the Creator's shrine.
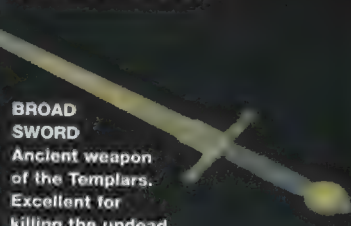
BROAD SWORD
Ancient weapon of the Templars. Excellent for killing the undead.

AELF'S DAGGER
Very powerful and magical. Shoots fireballs. Given to you by Aelf to link the two of you.
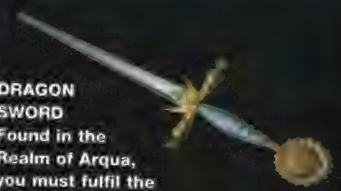
DRAGON SWORD
Found in the Realm of Arqua, you must fulfil the ritual of Eternity to gain access to this weapon.
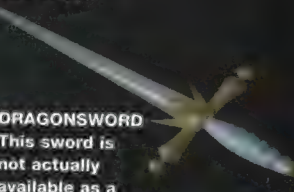
DRAGONSWORD
This sword is not actually available as a weapon, however it looks nice.

GRENADE LAUNCHER
17th century French cavalry flintick, has magical properties, it fires a devastating explosive charge.
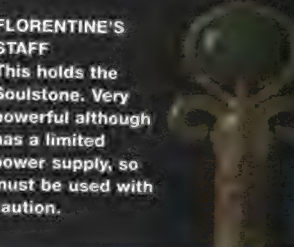
FLORENTINE'S STAFF
This holds the Soulstone. Very powerful although has a limited power supply, so must be used with caution.
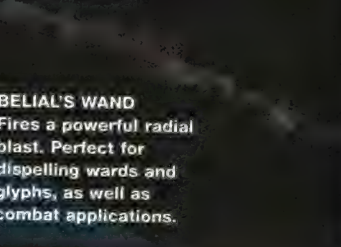
BELIAL'S WAND
Fires a powerful radial blast. Perfect for dispelling wards and glyphs, as well as combat applications.

Your first five minutes

Join us as we prime you for your first few minutes of Realms of the Haunting. Follow this guide and tread carefully though Chapter One: Shadows...

Welcome to Hell, son. Or rather, welcome to the hallway of what could very well turn out to be the gateway to Hell. Adam Randall is tired. He's wet. He's just been overcharged for the cab ride from the train station. What's more, he's just entered the hallway in the home of his dead father, Charles Randall, only to find he can't get out the way he came in. In true horror movie style, the door has just creaked shut. Locked. Sealed. Damn. Nowhere to go now but onwards – wherever it takes you. Pick up the matches in your FMV alter-ego and head into the house.

Mystical symbols

Exploring the hallway, you'll find that most routes are blocked to you either by locked doors – very frustrating – or by doors sealed with mystical symbols that seem to glow but are equally frustrating and unnerving to boot. Check out the portrait on the wall (the one with the New Labour, New Danger eyes) and you're told that its eyes are somehow following you.

Enter the ornate secondary vestibule and you discover a printer churning out a document. Reading the document you figure out that all is not well in the house of Randall. After all, you've seen *The Shining* and know that repetitions like, "We live... We live... We live... We live... We live... We live... We live..." can only mean one thing: evil spirits afoot! Still, the printer has also drawn your attention to an automatic pistol just sitting on the tabletop – that'll come in handy.

Priestly portraits

Moving into the corridors, you discover stacks of vases and even portraits of the priest, Elias Camber, who visited you in premonitions (recounted in the taxicab flashbacks). Beside a stairway you come across a turkey-like flesh-thing on the floor. "Rat. No head." Look up the two sets of stairs for what's a rather clever clue. A mirror in which you spy none other than your good self.

No, really, it's a clue. That mirror's a dead end, but head back to the first landing and make a left. At the end of the corridor there's a painting on the wall. A lavish Sarcophagus illustration flanked on each side by candles. But is it just a picture, or some kind of spooky mirror? Up by the rat, at the other end of the corridor there are also two candles.

Whip the matches out, light a candle and what a surprise, the candles in the painting spark to life as well. What about these haunted houses, eh? Light both the candles at the top of the corridor, then the two on either side of the painting and the portrait slides away revealing a key. Collect it sharpish and tiptoe backwards. Watch out for the trap – a green ball of fire launches itself from one of the paintings and shatters the window. Now, move a few game feet back and pop the key into the lock. Hey sesame, you've opened the door to the study. Where your problems are only just beginning...

▲The doors daubed with the slogans are closed to you. For the moment at least.

Realms of the Haunting will be in the stores in time for Christmas, and will be reviewed in full next issue of *PC Format*.

Here's where our walkthrough ends: in the study. Want a cheap thrill? Then listen to the record player.
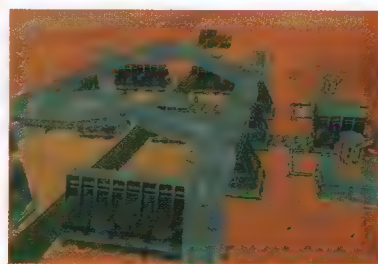
Sand Warriors

Due out on PC in February

The new combat flight sim from the makers of Retribution looks like nothing else on Earth...

Finding the offices of Astros Software is definitely a non-trivial task. Set down a side road in a nondescript suburb of Manchester, you're advised by Gremlin to look for the new Sainsburys under construction. The whole road seems to be under construction! If only Astros had erected, say, a 15-foot-high pyramid on its roof, we'd have found it much more easily. And its little offices, set above a painting shop, would seem much less incongruous. You see, inside those offices, Astros is making something much more impressive than a new supermarket. It's making a whole world.

Hunt them down!

Encoded Mission Briefing, Code ESB01001, Patrol: "Ir-en Har. Pay close attention. Being your first brief, follow it to the letter or it may be your last...There are three encounter points. First, you will follow the designated flight path from Abu Simbel to point one – Gebel Hawara and the Fourth Wane Temple. Any craft encountered must be taken out – fast and clean, no mess, no comeback. Stage two, you will re-arm your AVC at Gebel Lahun. From there, point three – Thebes. Deep Eyes reports Porphyry disturbance. This indicates the presence of A-Class engines, a Capital Barge – the site has no TGs. Be careful – whatever it is that's out there, you're going to run into heavy fire. Return only when

The Sand Warriors 3D engine can display up to 500 3D objects, making complicated cities like this a reality.

If you've ever spent hours queuing on the Severn Bridge, you'll understand...

The fluid swooping and diving of your craft enables tight dog-fights.

all encountered units are destroyed. Hunt them down, for Horus and the Banner!"

Cobwebbed secrets

Welcome to the dying desert world of Tawy, 6225 BC. Two ancient families are battling for victory and control of what's left of their battered, war-scarred planet. Scarab Laser Cannon's strafe and scorch the Tawy's venerable cities, while Osiris Vizier chain guns rattle in the smoky air above. And somewhere, deep in the bowels of Tawy, ancient cobwebbed secrets lie in wait. House Horus and House Set are both seeking them out, and whichever finds them first will have, it is said, an overwhelming advantage in the final stages of a war.

"Ancient Egypt – its civilisation, mythology and history – has provided us with a great opportunity," says Peter Karboulinis, producer and co-founder of Astros Software. "It's let us build an advanced world, yet one where technology merges seamlessly into monolithic structures." Most importantly, Astros hasn't just chucked a few pyramids into the desert and called the planet Sphinx. Together with Gremlin's Paul Green, it's created a fully immersive and believable world. Nick Page's rendered scenes complete the scene, featuring ceremonial temples bustling with onlookers dressed in jumpsuits.
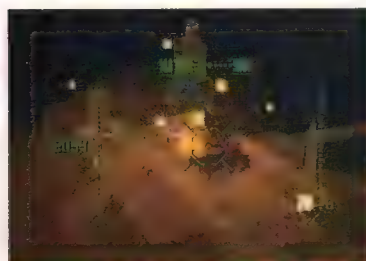
Flying on a night mission, we come across heavy anti-aircraft fire. The culprit is swiftly disposed of.
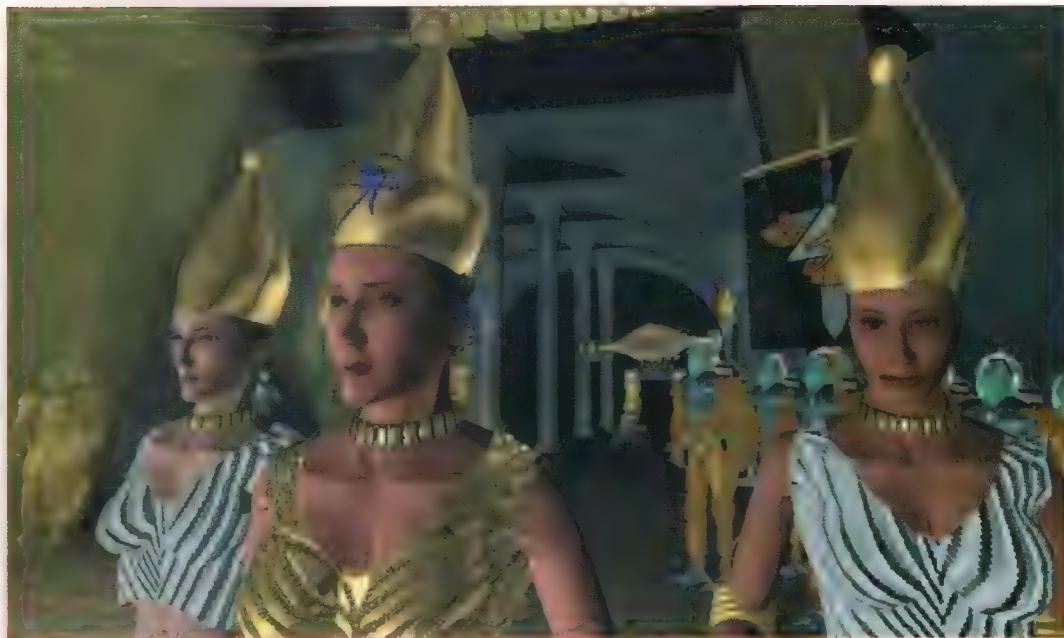
Your initial place in the world is an inauspicious one. A lowly ranking Falconer of House Osiris, you must complete the simplest of tasks (routine reconnaissance and salvage missions) with pathetically ill-equipped ships. Prove yourself, though, and your status will rise. Life on Tawy is all about status. Before you can fly the devastating Chariot's of the Gods, you must demonstrate your skills many times in battle.

Sweet delight

This shouldn't be too much of a chore, since fighting in *Sand Warriors* is a sweet delight. (It is, after all, a combat flight sim.) Boasting a wonderfully detailed SVGA engine, it throws you right into a culture tearing itself apart. On your way to destroy an aerodrome at Thebes, you might pass some other battle raging around a deserted desert outpost. You can actually drop into any confrontation

to lend a hand, in the style of a true hero. It's more than 3D – there's a fourth dimension at work: history. "In other flight sims, the whole war appears to run at one mission at a time," jokes Kab. "In a real war, several fights take place at once. *Sand Warriors* offers this richer environment."

Of course, a flight sim lives or dies by its engine. *Sand Warriors* looks like being one of the most impressive yet. On a fast machine it flies in SVGA, and there's not a single sprite to be seen.

More than 6,000 years ago, stretchy lycra fitness tops began their slow, inevitable conquest of the galaxy breasts.

The architecture is perhaps the most immediately impressive thing
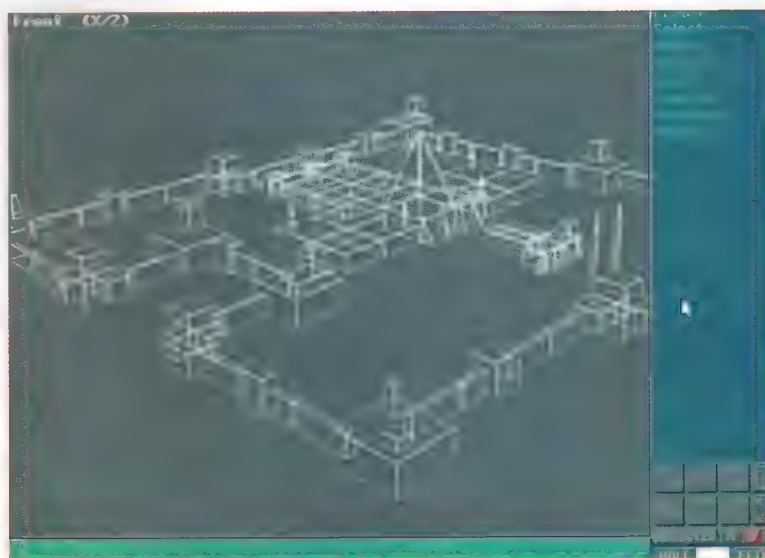
The landscape and inhabitants of Sand Warriors we designed in 3D Studio by Carl Adesile. One of the game's triumphs is the manner in which Astros has blended a modern sci-fi scenario with the enormous structures of Ancient Egypt.

You can actually fly inside many of the game's buildings. This is a refuelling station deep in the desert.

Purple sky at night, Set Horus' delight. But we've brought bombs to make sure.

The skies in Sand Warriors are superbly lit and textured.

SANDWARRIORS

"The in-house developed 3D engine, 3Dality, is probably the most advanced 3D flight engine around," says Kab confidently. It enables you to shoot literally anything (though you'll have to deal with the consequences!). You can even blast your way through the walls of the enormous buildings pinpricking the planet's surface like enormous upturned Scarab Beetles. Then you can fly around inside. It's breathtaking.
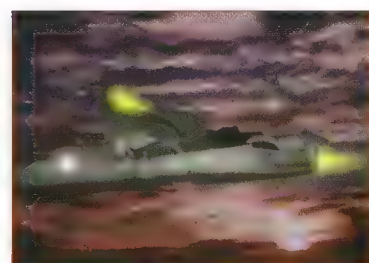
Pyramids and cities

"The 3D engine is capable of displaying up to 500 3D objects, 1,000 3D buildings – and of course the ground!" says Kab. "Some of the buildings are several hundred meters high and some of the Capital Ships can be even larger."

The architecture is perhaps the most immediately impressive thing about Gremlin's new game. Even more than the epic plot, the pyramids and cities justify the decision to plump for an Egyptian setting. It's like nothing we've seen before. Astros' designer, Carl Adesile, has revelled with 3D Studio to create a
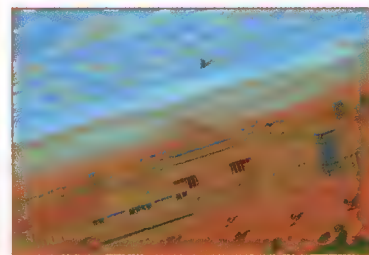
stunning blend of old and new. The space-faring inhabitants of Tawy inhabit gigantic interlinked tower blocks, that fuse with the rocks like undiscovered neighbourhoods at Petra. You can't help thinking that our own boy-Pharaohs would have felt right at home.

Encoded Mission Briefing, Code ESB02001, Convoy. "Gebel Zeit. You are familiar with this site, close as it is to the time gate near Memphis. Desc.Net have revealed a small but powerful Setian force present in the area. Where they came from is unknown, but what's important right now is that they're heading for the Time Gate. If we can't stop them, they could be inside our Perimeter Wall within the hour. I don't need to tell you what that could mean to the Horian War Machine. A-D's down at the Gate, so if they get close to the site, don't expect any backup. That's all. Good luck."

Racing across the ground to the missions, your ship flies like the devil. It's actually a cross between a helicopter and an advanced jet fighter. This further adds to *Sand Warrior's* unique appeal – what other game has you hugging the ground

at lightning speeds, only to have you slow to a near halt and hover above an enemy convoy, picking off targets at your leisure?

Pick off the target

"And you also have special manoeuvres," Kab says. "You have manoeuvres that circle around while you pick off the target and ones that lift you high out of trouble." These routines are for more than just effect. "They were needed so the player could fly around and inside the huge pyramid cities and their build-ings, as well as inside the gargantuan Capital Ships."

Equally, the array of weapons at your disposal is almost frightening. You've got missiles, chain guns and energy weapons, as well as old-fashioned bombs. To drop these you switch to a bomb-bay view, in which you float above the target and aim with a belly-down view. "We wanted to provide the player with different ways of attacking the enemy forces than the usual lasers and missiles," explains Kab. You can check what weapons you've got

Another fusion of new technology and old world mythology.

It was inevitable. When you find the Sphinx out in the desert, the compulsion to blast the grin off his face will be almost impossible to resist. We suggest you give it a go.

Words of power

Sand Warriors is a game with a rich background (as well as a richly textured 3D background). You won't get far if you don't speak the lingo.

A-Ds
Automated Defences.

AVC
Advanced Vectoring Craft. The fearsome fighter-class craft of the Imperial Sand Warriors, Also affectionately known as the Bug.

Deep Eyes
A scanning system developed to rapidly probe areas of deep desert. Deep Eyes detects Ion and Porphyry emissions. A positive detection indicates either Ore mining or drive/engine emissions. That usually means one of two things – Capital Barges or Time Gates.

Descryer Network
House Horus' Spy Network. Also known as the Desc. Net.

Porphs
Unstable rods of refined Porphyry held in Mercury and suspended in a Stasis Fields, Porphs are used to power Capital Engines and to bend light at the Time Gates.

Porphyry
A crystalline substance mined and refined into 'Porphs'. Used to fuel Capital Ships. Engine emission is quickly detected if you know where to look, but advancements in technology among the 'Gain' of House Horus and the development centre of House Set means that both sides are close to developing an emissions mask.

Set-Con
Set-Construct. The name of the Setian technology and scientific development network.

Time Gates
Also known as TGs. Used to relocate transports and ships over vast distances in an instant. Powered by Porphs, TGs work by bending light to project the traveller to a designated planet in space. Intricate co-ordinates are mapped out by supercomputers known as Timers. Two TGs must be employed for travel – one departure, the other arrival.

Timers
Supercomputers which run and operate the Horian Time Gates.

All right, own up, who tilted the planet's surface?

Sand Warriors offers both day and night missions.

mounted by simply looking left or right from the cockpit; the weapon mounts themselves are visible.

Encoded Mission Briefing, Code ESB03001, Defence. "Hibis, the Island city-state east of Karnak, is the site of probably the richest deep drilling Porphry reserve this side of Orion. Hor-Com intercepted a distress code bouncing over the net-field just a few minutes prior to your mission alert. It's a request for aid in defence of their city. As yet a neutral in the war, Hibis will be obliged to ally with Horus if a successful rout of the Setian advance can be achieved. Lives, a long overdue alliance and immense capital gain are at stake. Go do it!"

Dusty desert sands

Gremlin's mission is almost over. When we saw Sand Warriors, it looked fantastic.

By day the cities of Tawy cough with the dusty desert sands, while by night they twinkle and glow. Flying is a treat. And destroying bridges before enormous Bipeds stomp their way across makes you feel like the star of a crazy space opera. Kab admits it's been a long haul, but he's sure his team's created a winner. "This game will stand out because of our commitment. Quality in every aspect: theme, design and execution." Rather than taking a well-earned break, Astros is spending the last few days before shipping honing the gameplay.

"We feel that we have done everything we could to provide the player with a great game experience," says Kab. You'll get to find out just what he means very soon, when Sand Warriors, hits the shops. For Horus and the Banner!

By day the cities of Tawy cough with the dusty desert sands

Full texture-mapping turns an ineffectual wire-frame into a stomping, gun-toting bipedal menace.

Fragile Allegiance

Gremlin's bid for galactic supremacy is out now.

There's nothing in space but opportunities, aliens and sweet FA. We take a look at Gremlin's new rock-solid strategy game.

UGC7027 - Planetary Nebula

Knocking out the mining stations is handy work, even if the rest of the colony survives.

You can make pacts with alien races, although, as your aim is to destroy them all, you'll eventually need to renege.

As well as buying your ores for better prices, you can buy luxury items from traders and sell them later at profit.

ccording to Patrick Phelan, "There's nothing better than throwing missiles across the universe and watching your mates colony being blown to dust. Except adding to the insult by colonising it yourself!"

He's raving about *Fragile Allegiance*, Gremlin's new asteroid-fixated conquest-and-colonise game. *Fragile* tends to provoke these reactions in people. Like the meteor that once plummeted into Siberia, *Fragile Allegiance* has come from nowhere to obliterate the much-vaunted opposition… perhaps a surprise smash hit in the making.
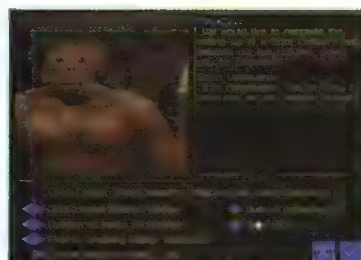
Imagine playing *Risk* in the dark, with a tiny Maglite illuminating each country in little pools of light, forcing you to make tactical decisions in a galaxy of uncertainty. Imagine playing *Civ 2* in the empty vacuums of space, but with all the excess baggage jettisoned from the airlock. Imagine playing the arcade classic *Asteroids*, except that instead of shooting up the gigantic space stones, you must park your spaceship on them and call them home. And imagine it with far better graphics.

Money, money, money

"We never consciously set out to borrow any aspects from other strategy games," stresses Phelan. Rather, he says, the great diversity of elements in *Fragile Allegiance* instead reflects the huge number of people involved in making the game. "Many of our friends and non-project-related staff got involved right from the off," says Phelan. "We just wanted to produce a game we ourselves would enjoy playing."

At its stony heart, *Fragile Allegiance* is all about making money. But instead of delivering coal or coordinating a successful pizza franchise, you get to plunder terrestrially-challenged lumps of rock – and annihilate aliens into the bargain. Now, we don't doubt that, say, the City trading floor is a trigger-edged tempest of excitement, but let's face it, it's not going to beat beefing up your marketing campaign with a fleet of photon-wielding Star Destroyers.

Does *Fragile Allegiance* prove we're all greedy capitalists at heart? "Well yes, I suppose so," says Phelan. "We all like to

Does Fragile Allegiance prove that we're all greedy capitalists?

Manic miners

Incredibly, mining in *Fragile Allegiance* is enthralling. There are ten types of ore and each has a name: Selenium, Asteros, Balrium, Crytalite, Quazinc, Bytanium, Korellium, Dragonium, Traxium and Nexos.

There are also three types of mine – Standard mines, Deep Bore mines and Seismic Penetrators. Standard and Deep Bore mines can extract only the humbler minerals. Traxium and Nexos require Seismic Penetration. To build the most devastating missiles, like the Virus or Mega missile, you'll need these rarest minerals.

Mining a unit of ore takes anything from four to 30 days, so to plunder an asteroid quickly, you need to build lots. The payback is that once the asteroid is sucked for all its worth, the mines are useless. Building Rhondda valleys is an expensive tactic.

Another key point – every asteroid is unique (and has its own much-loved place in the Universe). Thus a strategy that might be useful for an asteroid riddled with cheap ore will need some revising when applied to a more lucrative one.

In another incredibly handy life-saving move from Gremlin, you're able to build ore teleporters. These neat gizmos enable you to beam all your ore to one central location in the belt.

Our previous attack spreads across the surface of the colony. That'll teach them to smile at us funny again.

The field generator is just one of the wonders Sci-Tek has to offer.

The Federal Transporter returns every few months to collect your ores.

Where your missiles land is largely a matter of hit and miss. Naturally.

With some games, you almost have to schedule loo breaks

feel in control and to see rewards for our efforts." For this reason, Gremlin concentrated on developing an economics model that could deliver tangible, visible rewards to the player, without giving too much away too soon. "The money elements of the game were fine-tuned right up to beta," says Phelan. "We had to get the ratios just right – we didn't want people getting things like nukes right away."

The bottom line

Your corporate paymaster is TetraCorp. It's awarded you the 24th century's equivalent of a Young Business Grant: a transporter and a million credits. Your transporter carries a grow-your-own-colony kit called a CPU. Once it's powered up, you can start building more substantial spacebases. Hydration facilities, air-processors and hydroponic food farms are all vital to keep your workers working. Somewhere to live and drink booze, a security force to make their lives a misery – the colonists make huge demands on your current account. Remember, you'll soon be rewarding them with a phalanx of ore mines. There they'll extinguish their miserable lives with endless, dreary hard labour. The bottom line is your bottom line.

Once you've mined some ore, you can either store it to make goodies like spaceships or else you can sell it. To obtain the most devastating weapons,

you'll need to retain some ore, particularly a few crates of Traxium and Nexos. Other races also want these rare ores, so they fetch a hefty premium on the open market. You can even build up stockpiles of the most precious ores, and then manipulate the price like a despotic oil baron.

So, your diggers are digging and the federal transporter turns up every 90 days to reward your hard labour. Is this all there is to *Fragile Allegiance*? No. My friend, it's only the equivalent of collecting £200 each time you pass go in Monopoly.

Even though *Fragile Allegiance* is all about making money, the real money is in making widows. (After all, up to six alien races are also attempting to grab what's rightfully yours.) Eventually you'll build a construction yard and send your first scout out into the gloom. If you're lucky, you'll discover a deserted grey planetoid ready for plundering. But you might just find your home sits in the equivalent of the asteroid belt's downtown Bronx. "In this way the game forces the player to constantly re-asses his situation," explains Phelan. "Especially when he comes across another player or alien race."

This is where the *Risk* analogy struts in. You'll soon have an archipelago of dispersed colonies. Deciding what to defend, what's indispensable and what can be sacrificed is critical. In a stroke of
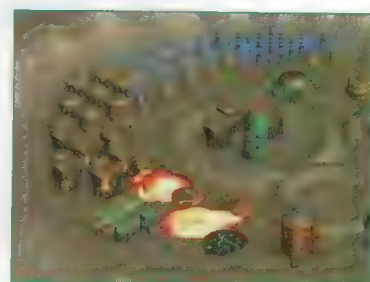
genius, Gremlin has implemented the fogging effects so beloved of real-time strategy games. In effect, you can only ever see what your ships or spy satellites can see. You might make your northern frontier your strongest front, only to discover your Battlecruisers were deterring dawn raids from the inter-galactic rag 'n' bone men. Meanwhile, a thousand greenies in lycra have pulled up down south. It's like fortifying Iceland, only to face an uprising in Yakutsk.

Bucking the trend

"But how," you're wondering, "Do I concentrate on crushing these aliens when I'm trying to run a successful *Asteroid* mining franchise?" Well, some-body on the development team had the same thought. Bucking the escalating trend towards maximum-simulation (with some games, you almost have to schedule loo breaks for your troopers) *Fragile Allegiance* lets you concentrate on just the fun stuff. Most importantly, you can buy colony supervisors. These are characters whose name grossly belies their usefulness. Not only will your supervisors keep an eye on your pre-constructed colonies, they'll build them for you too. Genius.

Phelan happily agrees. "We had a couple of people here who just wanted to mash the aliens and couldn't be bothered with the everyday running of the colonies. So the supervisors will do
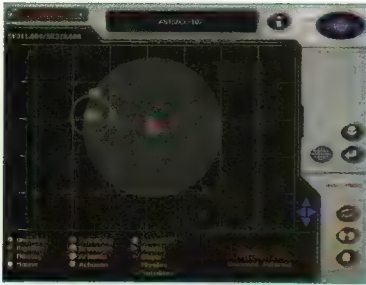
The universe can be a tiny place.
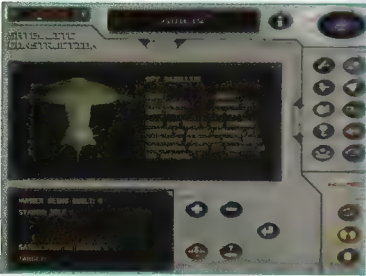
"Your best spy satellite, please."

Just how fragile will your allegiances prove to be?

it for you – at a cost." It's this cheery flexibility towards its audience that partly explains why *Fragile* works so well. "After your first hour or so of playing *FA* you can move the game to any level. Deep trading, alliances with races, war, macro management, the game is that flexible."

A waste of time

There are two ways to convince an alien culture that its toil, millennium of learning and subsequent discovery of space travel was really all a waste of time: your missiles and your fleets.

Missiles are like shock troopers. A heavy bombardment makes even the most toothsome alien quiver. But often you'll need the surgical agility of your spaceships. Sending in a fleet of ships to eradicate an impudent colony or a rival flotilla of alien craft is the cue for top *Battlestar Galactica* dogfights. You can't control the ships, you watch the action with spy satellites. This is probably for the best, if you consider that you'll soon have up to ten fleets of maybe three dozen craft-kicking alien ass across the sector. *Fragile Allegiance* is about being the boss. "We could have done a combat section that relied on you manipulating single units in combat," admits Phelan, "But the emphasis is on a well-rounded strategy game. The combat sections are simply the spectacular result of your strategy and planning, not tactics."

Fragile Allegiance isn't all about war. Sometimes you might want to spare your alien opponents until you've got the weaponry to do the job properly. This is where treaties come in. Treaties are your chance to bargain with another culture to buy time, ores or peace settlements. In case you're wondering, *Fragile Allegiance* is an aptly-named encounter. Breaking commitments carries a hefty fine, enforced by the Federation, but at times you'll probably think it's worth it.

Interestingly, it's the first game to take advantage of Gremlin's new facial motion capture system, which animates

the heads of in-game characters. You can scrutinise a rival ambassador's poker face for the merest hint of bluff, and look for give-away signals like twitching eyes, shivers or two upright fingers. All the characters in the game – the traders, ambassadors, supervisors and agents – are real-life Gremlin staff. They pull off their impersonations of futuristic space low-life with frightening panache.

Did we mention the Agents? Yes, *Fragile Allegiance* enables you to employ special agents to do your dirty work. Using the ancient and closely-guarded techniques of cunning and espionage (such as pretending to be the paperboy) your agents gather vital information about your enemies strengths and weaknesses. You can even employ them to sabotage the defence systems.

Inventive twist

There's one final inventive twist to *Fragile Allegiance*, which will ensure its place in the hall of gaming fame. The asteroids actually drift. As a result, you can spend

days getting your colonies running, only to have them collide; chance is playing extra-terrestrial snooker with your livelihood. Of course, Gremlin comes to the rescue with two life-enhancing bits of kit. Gravity Nullifiers prevent asteroid's getting intimate, or you can retrofit the asteroid with internal engines and simply drive it out of the way. (Or, tch tch, into another asteroid.)

It's this accommodating style that sets *Fragile Allegiance* apart and will ensure its success. "Its big appeal is that it's flexible," says Phelan. "It rewards players that wish to get involved in the tiny details without penalising the player who wants a quick fix." Extensive playtesting has ensured that the finished game will match anything you can throw at it.

"Some of the most unusual strategies were developed in the eight-player network battles," Phelan reveals. "By the way, the record for the most asteroids managed was 80 asteroids, with 12 colony supervisors."

Now there's a challenge for you.

Intelligent interfacing

Fragile Allegiance boasts a user interface Steve Jobs would be proud of. It whirs, whistles and beeps. Windows jam shut with a self-satisfied gasp for air, like the doors in *Star Wars*.

There are two views: the Asteroid View Screen shows you the colony you're working on. It's from here you build structures and spacecraft, coordinate your mining and so on. The other view is The Big Picture. This shows you All Of Known Space, which amounts to just a solitary red dot at the start of the game but quickly swells to take in a whole belt of rocks drifting in Brownian Motion.

Sending awesome fleets to devastate rival 'roids is a matter of amassing the armada and clicking on enemies. Give thanks that the Americans have nothing close to Gremlin's technology.

The control panels in Fragile Allegiance bristle with arrows and icons. Ship construction just isn't the same as it used to be.

Hardcore

4x4

Hardcore 4x4 is out now on Saturn and PlayStation and due on PC early 1997

Off-road racing is the sport that television forgot. But Gremlin is resurrecting the big wheeled action in its latest racing game.

My nose. I can't feel my nose. Your trucks take a real pounding and show it too.

here's a sketch in the most brilliant TV comedy series *The Fast Show* called The Off-Roaders. It's based around two guys who love taking their Land Rover down the steepest hills and over the most rugged terrain. They stand and swagger by their vehicle, dubbed The Behemoth, and boast about stuff like "the mother of all gullies." Then, they get all excited, start whooping, climb in their machine, shout "Let's off-road!" and get stuck on the first divot of earth that they try to cross.

Hardcore 4x4 is nothing like that, even though game designer Ade Carless still "acknowledges the influence" and admits that "Yes, the game is very *off-road*". *Hardcore 4x4* lines up some of the most exaggerated, over-engineered pieces of metal this side of the space programme and pits them in races over

the most rugged terrain this side of – well, let's say Mars! Gremlin's pedigree on racing games goes back to the top *Lotus* series, originally on the Amiga, but more recently it brought us the popular *Fatal Racing*… a game where you spent far too long in the sky!

Let's off road!

Capturing the spirit of off-roading isn't as easy as you might think. As Carless explained, "The noise and the music goes a long way – but then there's the physics in the game engine." Creating a believable movement model was a substantial challenge. Gamers instinctively know when the dynamics of, let's say a skid are wrong. To this end, the boffins at Gremlin spent an amazing two years working on the physics, as Carless elaborated, "The car models are built up of independent elements – there's the four wheels and

then the chassis. On top of that, there are many parameters you can tweak such as gear ratio, turning circle, traction, suspension… you can even alter the centre of gravity for the vehicle." Carless left the dynamics at that, but did point out that "The maths was dead hard with lots of algorithms!"

Lining up against other vehicles, you bash your way around a circuit, but you'd do well to remember that it's not about break neck speeds. It's also about inching up steep adverse cambers, foot barely on the gas, in a gear somewhere between neutral and one! As Carless explains "It's more about channelling speed – squirting it in the right places."

The six different off-roaders on offer in *Hardcore 4x4* boast bouncing suspensions and wheels that would make the Michelin man run for cover! Carless tried to defend Gremlin's choice of trucks with the voice of moderation. "They were modelled on American bone-shakers – not quite as comedy as Big Foot – more the kind of barmy trucks you see even on Mainstreet, USA. You could say they're based on off-the-peg vehicles."

The trucks come equipped with roll-bars as standard – essential as your wheels, four by four, or not are going to end up pointing skyward at some stage in the game. Carless noted that "the trucks do roll over" but that they would "right themselves after a while." Gremlin didn't bother with the aesthetics of
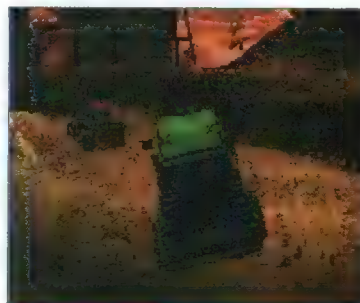
This guy isn't rolling onto the desert building site to dump his load. Rather, he's trying to get back in the race.

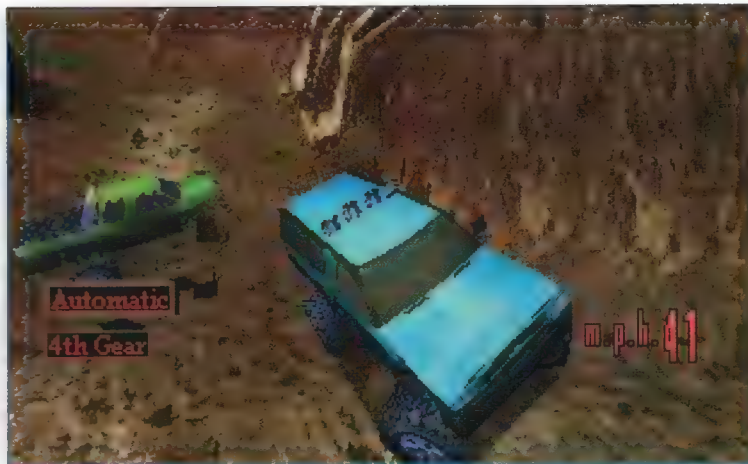On your left, luscious vegetation. On your right a ravine. Now could you move back to the left please. PLEASE!

You'll need to drop a few gears for the steeper climbs. About now, is the time you regret taking out an automatic truck and long to crash down through the gears to get yourself some traction.

including any crane animations or such nonsense to right you. Carless again: "It's a game convention with bugger all to do with reality."

Over the hills

Terrain provides all sorts of different challenges and hazards. You're fighting as much against the dirt as with your rival racers. Settings include sand, snow, rock and mud. Look out for the sand on the Devil's Kitchen race thrown up against the windscreen. One track, the Hade's Highway is set at night, and has you driving through almost pitch black conditions. Carless: "The depth cues to black to make it nigh-on-impossible on the expert version." Another has you racing across an active volcanic island and dodging fresh igneous rock. The fire

and brimstone action seems very *Realms of the Haunting* and Carliss was tight-lipped about whether that level (featured near the end of the game) was set in Hell.

Of all the effects, Carless claims that the hardest to simulate was the snow and ice of the game's glacial ravines. "The difficulty was getting the lack of grip and momentum on the truck right. So you'd loose the backend and go into the spin. To get that right and still retain the playability, without making it frustrating, was a nightmare. Originally it played like a pond skater on acid – you just went everywhere. It took a lot of trial and error to make it feel real and fun."

The actual number of routes you take through the levels is one of the defining characteristics that makes

Hardcore such a promising prospect. You need to pick the right line, and it's not just the classical racing line either. Carless emphasises that, while you can take short-cuts, it's not a cross-country race. "You're not exactly rambling across the maps, but choosing a flatter line to take along a track – where the other is extremely bumpy and jarring – can gain you a few extra seconds though."

Loosing a few panels is all part of a day's good racing. Something to show off about down at the body shop. No, not that Body Shop.

"Wheels that would make the Michelin man run for cover."

It's an up and over...

You'll be needing the very best suspension to make the most of the courses in Hardcore 4x4. Here we see a battered and gnarled truck gingerly approaching a drop – far too quickly. Feel those hydraulics go pop!

Reloaded

Due out on PlayStation and PC for Christmas 1996

The sequel for the PC game that never was. The visceral blaster Reloaded offers up both friendly and unfriendly fire.

omparisons with *Reloaded* are obvious... and yet surprising. In an era in which every PC developer seems to want a piece of the first-person-perspective cake, offering up games that are a-bit-like-*Quake*-except-with-puzzles or a-bit-like-*Quake*-except-with-dialogue, Gremlin has taken an altogether different route for its all-action PC debut. *Reloaded* is, in fact, a bit like two games, neither of which is exactly flavour of the month on PC. Remember the classic coin-op *Gauntlet*? Or, how about the Bitmap Brothers' hit *The Chaos Engine*? Well, *Reloaded* picks up both balls and runs with them. Or kicks both balls into touch. Or kicks both balls and leaves them in a mess of grotesque muscle, corpuscle and scar tissue. It's *Gauntlet 2000*. It's *The Chaos Engine* meets *ER*. It's bloody brilliant.

Maybe you need a bit of background. All this might be new to you, if you don't

The killer action now has just that extra bit of hunter-killer spice

own a PlayStation. When Sony's console first shipped, almost every developer produced a first-person-perspective 3D action game. Since Sony rigorously controlled what programmer's could and couldn't do, coders were forced to use all the proprietary routines in the console's hardware. Hence, almost all these games looked remarkable similar, with remarkably flat, shiny polygon surfaces. Sure they were nice, but nothing really stood out. Then along came *Loaded*.

Blasting gameplay
Featuring a forced perspective, dozens of gloriously animated sprites, a soundtrack by Pop Will Eat Itself and back-to-basics blasting gameplay, it took America by storm. Out of over a quarter of a million copies sold worldwide (none of which shifted in Germany, where it was banned because of the violence) 160,000 turned up inside American PlayStations. *Loaded* became Gremlin's biggest-selling American PlayStation game almost overnight, outdoing even *Actua Soccer*. One in six PlayStation owners had a copy of *Loaded* and even PWEI saw a boom in their record sales.

But all that's history. And what's more, it's history on the wrong format. *Loaded* appeared briefly on a Gremlin PC release schedule, but never saw the light

of day. As producer Ade Carless explains, "At the time we just didn't think the PC would support it. Machines were still too slow. We wanted to get lighting effects and visuals just right. We did give it a blast – but decided a low spec version just wouldn't do the game justice. We shelved the game and started again". But now we're to be treated to the wonderful sequel, *Reloaded* on PC. Don't forget your sick bag!

Without dwelling too much on storyline, suffice to say that it's a dreadfully tenuous, under-researched and sketchy effort at justifying carnage on a mass scale (Tch tch, and this from the makers of *Realms of the Haunting*). There's a bad guy called CHEB, which stands for Charming Handsome Erudite B*****d . (In the last game he was called FUB – Fat Ugly B*****d – imaginative stuff, right?). Anyway, there's him, a cosmic equivalent of Woodstock, with 1,000 struggling artists and hippies, and a dastardly plan, which we really shouldn't waste time explaining here. Let's talk gameplay instead.

Crude and old-fashioned
The main criticisms of the original would be seen by many as virtues – but that's no reason for Gremlin not to address them! Some felt that *Loaded* was a tad
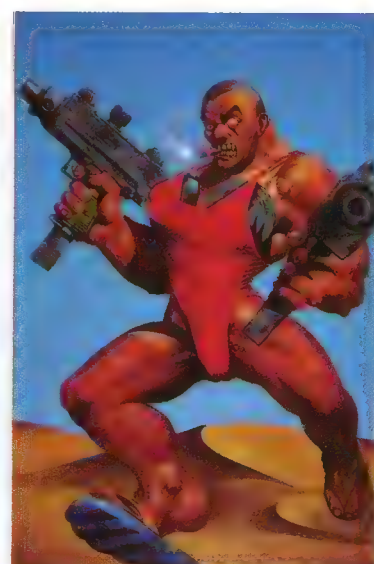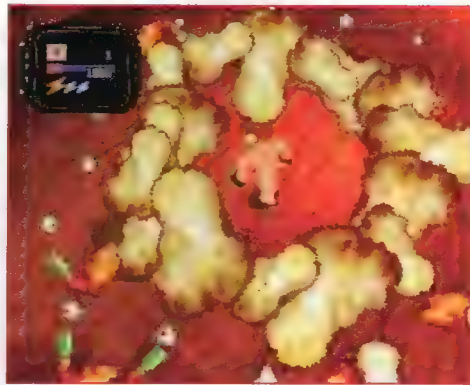

▶ Here we see the selection of players you get to control. Look at the cartoon faces and decide which resembles you.

Can a pink suit save you from certain death? Or will you have to rely on your three-barrelled Tommy?

Nowhere to run to baby. Nowhere to hide. Weapons like this do no end of good to your score.

The violent content of Reloaded is unlikely to win the game many friends in Germany.

crude and old-fashioned. Wandering a world wiping out everything in your path just wasn't enough for some gamers. Even *Doom* made some pretence of creating depth, with puzzles to solve, hidden doors and switches, keys to find and the like. So, in *Reloaded* the killer action has been mixed up with just that extra bit of hunter-killer spice.

Cerebral challenges

Gremlin has cut down on the enemies to create a more structured game, and promises some whole new cerebral challenges. Yes, it's even offering interaction with characters. Cease the mindless mayhem for a moment, and indulge in a little RPG-small talk. Not too much, mind. No banter about the weather, much more about gaining information – "I see you've already found where we've stashed the explosives and heavy weapons" – and the like. Now that's really something.

The graphics have also been souped up with more of an isometric view. The 3D of *Loaded* was merely a thin veneer on the 2D action. You still won't exactly be jumping for joy, but the visuals will offer a deeper, more satisfying Imperial Leather lather and feel. Look out for new morphing terrain effects and more

sophisticated gimmicks on the levels, such as lifts to take you to rooftops.

Reloaded offers six worlds to explore, chock-full of gimmicks. One level based in a desert has hidden mines to explore, while another is set in a diamond factory. The latter maps have a neat gimmick, with laser refracting prisms and mirrored, reflective surfaces which enable you to bounce death rays!

Character development has also been treated to a makeover. The person-alities you get to control were always one of *Loaded's* biggest unique selling propositions. *Reloaded* gives you a choice of six psychotic characters to choose from, designed by *2000AD* artist Jason Brashill, who's created some of the most bizarre and stylised players ever.

Spoiling your appetite

Among the cast are Magpie, a cybernun with one mutha (superior) of a weapon – Gremlin's joke not ours – and the Consumer, a character who, so the hype goes, *can* eat between meals without spoiling her appetite. An old favourite, Vox, has moved on to greener pastures, game folklore would have you believe, with a career in glamour modelling.

Player characters have plenty of new special moves and weapons too.

You'll even find yourself poring over player performance stats. Boom, and get special skills and weapon powers. Bust, and get less booty, lower scores and other more macabre 'punishments'. Finally, a new Friendly Fire feature puts the power to wound fellow team members into your hands, too – so just mind out where you're pointing those twin uzis!

▲ Booming explosions are very much the order of the day in Reloaded. Nice flames, and even nicer see-through meshes on the floor.

HardWar

HardWar will ship on PC in Easter 1996.

Steel is hard and so's HardWar. Straight out of Sheffield and out to rewrite the Elite legend.

heffield was once famous for its steel. Now it's famous for much more… and a confluence of talent and taste has created the conditions for *HardWar* – three loaded barrels of pure Sheffield steel, uniting Gremlin, Warp and Designer's Republic to create one very special game.

You'll fly up, over, through and around buildings. Here we go around.

Yes, in this era of e-mail, fax and international marketing, Gremlin found all the talent it needed to put together *HardWar* within one square mile up in Sheffield. Gremlin's bringing you the gameplay, Warp the music and Designer's Republic… the look. First up, the game.

No place like home

Imagine making your home in a city no one wants to live in. On a planet no one wants to inhabit. A place where all that people wanted to do was escape. Welcome to Jupiter's icy moon Titan and the city of Misplaced Optimism. This sprawling conurbation, built across nine craters is a dirty, little pocket of human-kind. Colonised as an afterthought, it's a place where *HardWar*'s slogan – that the 'Future is Greedy' constantly rings true.

Your role in all this, is as a rational self-seeker called an Operative, who makes a living as a speculator, a free agent. Your bread and butter income comes from trading, but there's many better ways to make a fast buck. Randomly generated missions give you the chance to try your hand at bounty hunting, gun running, assassination and more. Is there a purpose to all this? Well, that's up to you.

The game environment is open ended leaving you to get on with the action. Play *HardWar* as just an expandable shoot-'em up, accepting the random missions that ping up on your e-mail and you're rewarded with kit and wealth – work your way to the top the roster. Pick up on the plot seeds though, around 30 special missions, and gradually you figure out that not only is there a way to substantially change the power balance in Misplaced Optimism, but also a route off-planet.

The moody, sombre lighting and streamlined craft give HardWar a sub-aqua feel.

Low bunker buildings characterise the seedier side of Titan town.

"Games are kind of a youth division for the media industry."
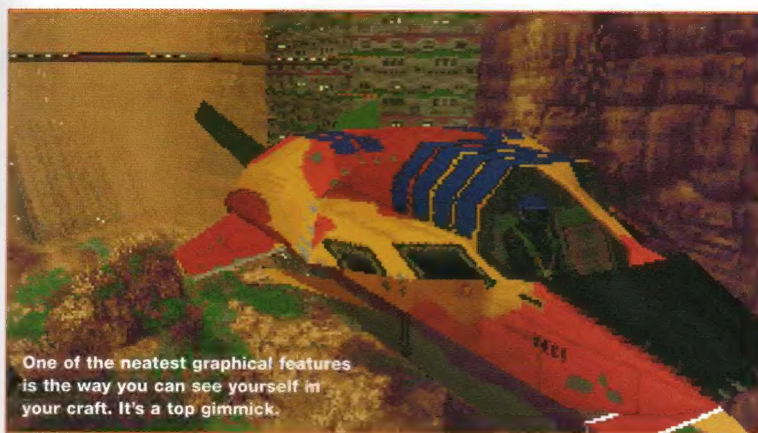
One of the neatest graphical features is the way you can see yourself in your craft. It's a top gimmick.

Open ended games like *HardWar* need above all to have a believable game world. In a drive towards authenticity the action all takes place in a real time environment with short night/day cycles. Time of day is important as you're flying solar powered craft and at night merely reaching a fuelling up 'Light Well' will be most competitive. Additionally bold claims are being made for the quality of the artificial intelligence. Police, traders and factions will all respond to and learn from player behaviour – double cross them and they'll remember!

The 3D visuals been designed by Software Refinery – developer of the awesome *Slipstream*. The graphics engine is born again since *Slipstream* and is beautifully detailed, offering a true 3D environment players can explore, entering buildings and even travelling around by mono rail.

Hardcore tunes!

Putting together the soundtrack for *HardWar*, Gremlin chose an altogether more radical option than just letting its in-house composers knock out a few tunes. Instead, in keeping with the Sheffield born and bred nature of the game, Gremlin went to Warp – one of Britain's leading, totally independent record labels. Warp started out in 1989, specialising in music from the Sheffield area and quickly became what it is today, a national label with artists all over the world, including the likes of Aphex Twin (well known for its moody, ambient tunes), Black Dog and Andy Weatherall's concept-band Sabres of Paradise. You'll be familiar with the most famous track from Sabres of Paradise – called *Theme*, it's the one featured in the Bacardi ad based at the card school.

So, when Warp was approached by Gremlin to lend its seal of sound approval, the studio jumped at the chance. As big-wig Greg Eden explains; "They said, that they keen to get some decent music, and that a few of the game's developers were big Warp fans. So, it seemed like the natural thing to do and what's more the Sheffield connection made it all feel worthwhile." It's not the first time that big name dance labels have been pulled in to work on a sound track

– the most recent example is the *Wipeout* music from Psygnosis. Eden is critical of Psygnosis' endeavour, pointing out that *Wipeout* "went for the easy pop route. Chemical Brothers and Prodigy isn't exactly cutting edge – they've taken the soft option."

DJ selection

So how did Gremlin go about picking the tracks? Eden again: "The guy who was producing the game had a big Warp collection, so he picked out the tracks he wanted to use in the game. We dealt with the musicians and handled the licensing." The final selection includes tracks from Black Dog, LFO, Aphex Twin, Speedy J and RAC, but sadly no original tunes. As Eden explained, "A few of the artists (such as Autechre) were keen to compose original material, but there just wasn't time. That fact alone, that they were prepared to produce new stuff, shows how far video game music has come. It's definitely an area we want to do more of."

The third Sheffield connection was with top graphics studio Designers Republic. The ten-year old company, famous for its record sleeves and original typographical style, had previously flirted with computer games designing images for *Wipeout*. The studio's involvement with *HardWar* went beyond just tailoring the packaging, to actually designing the ingame iconography. Ian Anderson, managing director of the ten-year-old studio isn't at all surprised to find himself designing game visuals or packaging, "It's just a question of evolution for games, software and music. It's natural that games will be packaged in a similar way to record sleeves, using alike disciplines and parameters. Games are kind of a youth division of the entertainment industry!"

When *HardWar* is finished it's going to be compared to a lot of other games. It'll crop up in sentences with the likes of *Elite* (David Braben's original) for its depth of gameplay and trading. Psygnosis' futuristic blaster *Wipeout* for it's zeitgeisty graphics and audio. And *Privateer: The Darkening* for it's storyline strands. We trust these comparisons will all be favourable.

Ship shapes (And Sheffield fashion)

Your ships in *HardWar* are called Moths – it's a tortured but successful analogy for the fact that they're solar powered. There are five basic Moth chassis which all come equipped with a computer and headlights. The player can soup their ship up with both software and hardware upgrades, adding defence systems, extra weaponry and the like.
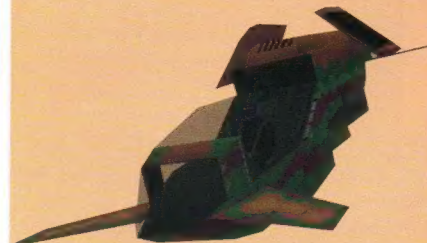
SILVERY
You start with this light-weight chassis. It's small, but fast if you upgrade the engine.

MOON MOTH
This roomier model offers increased cargo capacity, ideal for the trading routes.

NEO-TIGER
It's unlikely that this fetching camouflage paint job will actually offer any protection.

HAWK
A top of the range Montego. Lots of neat features but not top of the company tree.

DEATH'S HEAD
The ship you'll scrimp, save and murder for. Tooled up with all mod cons.

HardWar offers a massive game world to explore.

A sporting

The Story so far...

Sports games are big business. If you get it right and players buy into your brand, they'll keep coming back year after year, for gimmicks, updated statistics and more. Gremlin's always had something of a sporting heritage, with the Premier Manager series, and when it released Actua Soccer in 1995 it showed that not only could it program that elusive genre, it could also make it damned playable too.

Actua Soccer made the most of Gremlin's motion capture facilities – it was the first UK games firm to install a tracking system. On top of that, it featured a brilliant commentary from Barry Davies. Gremlin entered the crowded arcade sports genre and overnight stamped its authority on it. Actua Soccer scored higher review marks than competitor FIFA 96 in almost every magazine – here at PC Format we gave them 90% (PCF 51) and 89% (PCF 52) respectively. Actua Soccer was converted to PlayStation and Mac, and followed up with another smash Euro 96 – a hideously successful license. Then, on top of that success, the company pulled off another coup when Euro 96 was selected by BT as the launch title for its new Wireplay service, a facility that enables PC games to be played over the telephone network.

1996 saw Actua Golf on the Sega Saturn and PlayStation, and bold plans for the Actua Sports brand are now coming to fruition. We've spared you details here of Actua Soccer 2 – it isn't expected until well into Summer '97 – and instead focused on the next four big PC titles. Read on...

Actua Soccer Club Edition

Due on PC and PlayStation in April 1997

At first glance, *Actua Soccer Club Edition* looks like a bit of a cash-in. The game engine from *Euro 96* with just a new data set. But stop and take a second glance and you'll see that there's much more to this re-working of *Actua Soccer*. As producer Tony Casson explained, "Obviously, we realise that you can't just produce the same game and then charge full-price. So we're aiming for a lower price and adding lots of new features."

For starters, Gremlin is recording a brand new commentary. Once again it will be wheeling in Barry Davies to lend his inimitable vocal talents. Casson claims that Davies "likes his trips to Sheffield!" And on top of that, the game designers will be tweaking the gameplay. We were already treated to a reworking with *Euro 96* and this will enhance the engine further.

The biggest change, of course, is the fact that Gremlin is putting all the Premiership teams into place – this is after all a club edition! It will feature the full Premiership teams and all the squads, along with Panini-style photos of the latest players and full statistics for every footballer in the Premier league. At time of going to press, Gremlin is negotiating with a major photo library to finally confirm the rights. Casson believes the right way to regard *Actua Soccer Club Edition* is as "an add-on, but one which you don't need the original game to run".

Pick up your trusty joypad and control the likes of this happy fellow.

Actua Tennis

Due on PC and PlayStation in April 1997

Just imagine for a moment that you're designing a tennis game and are interested in acquiring a license go with it. Which would you try to get? Bearing in mind, of course, that the Davis Cup has already been snatched up. *Actua Tennis* producer Tony Casson is stubbornly quiet over who Gremlin is talking to, and claims that the company is, "Still deciding on whether to use real names." adding that, "We are currently negotiating for a high profile license." Hmm. They don't come much higher than the British lawn tennis tournament, Wimbledon.

Fishing for clues in our interview, we tentatively asked whether it would be exclusively a lawn tennis tournament. That was no help, as Casson is determined to feature "all different types of surface, so as to introduce as many options as possible." *Actua*

Tennis will also feature Singles or Doubles tournaments, ladders and single matches with a range of difficulty options. Ho hum. Maybe commentators could offer up a clue – after all, Gremlin would want a high profile commentator. Again, no progress. Casson: "We're negotiating for commentators. If you were to watch tennis on the BBC you'd have a good idea of who we're talking to."

It's only on the subject of graphics and gameplay that Gremlin is prepared to open up its heart. On presentation Casson explained that "We are using motion captured players – but trying to make the action fast too." On the subject of gameplay, Casson cited *Super Tennis* on the Super Nintendo – a title that any self-respecting sports fan should already own. Apart from these measly facts, though, the rest is silence. We wait in anticipation.
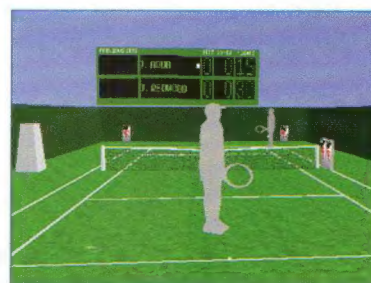
An early development image. What else would you expect so early in production?

send-off

Actua Golf

Due on PC in April 1997

While there's no shortage of golf games on the PC, Gremlin still believes that its drive-'em-up will knock the spots and silly trousers off the competition. The PlayStation version has already been released and universally adored by the console press. We've played it and it's pretty good, but why might it be king of the clubhouse on the PC? We asked producer, Pete Cook, whose existing credits include the likes of *Roth* and *Fragile Allegiance*.

The first thing Cook was eager to tell us about was the true 3D game engine. As he explained, "With 2D you've got no idea of the depth that the ball has travelled. *Actua Golf* features cameras that follow the flight of the ball, from adjustable angles, from the swing of the club right through to where it lands"

Another feature unique to *Actua Golf* is the player rendering. Most golf games digitise the human player, making swings authentic but always the same. *Actua Golf* instead uses motion capture for extra realism. Your little guy is a polygonal

model, based on data taken from a chap called Neal Cheatahn – a Sheffield-based golf pro who spent a whole two days going through the motions in Gremlin's studio.

One thing *Actua Golf* has that no other PC golf game can boast, is a live commentary from Radio 5's voice of golf, Peter Allis. He made quite an impression on the Gremlin team, and Cook describes him as "very professional with a great sense of humour", adding that he was "dead good at ad-libbing. We gave him a script but he added loads to it."

Grown-ups of all ages who miss their Action Man will also be glad to know that the game will feature options to choose your golfer's outfit. The PlayStation version enables you to set just one clothing colour, but Cook boasts that on the PC version, "we'll add head gear and trousers".

As for the control mechanism, while the PlayStation and PC version shared the standard power bar arrangement, Gremlin is currently working on an additional control method for PC.

Cook says it will be "harder to use and take more skill... something to do with using the mouse". Should be interesting.

Not only can you give a stunning performance out on the green, you can cut a dash in the clubhouse afterwards with your coordinated outfits!

Premier Manager 97

Due on PC in March 1997

Gremlin owes its sports game pedigree largely to one game – conceived long before *Actua Soccer* or the application of motion-capture to computer entertainment. That game is *Premier Manager*. Gremlin had fantastic success with *Premier Manager* and its sequels, a dynasty begun five years ago and which, despite having one of the tackiest boxes in history, has been absolutely huge!

That's why it's surprising to hear producer Tony Casson (who followed the series from the very first) boast that Gremlin is now designing "a complete new game". As he explained, "We've dumped everything from the existing series and instead looked at the latest soccer management games. We've found that people are wanting a lot more depth, a lot more realism".

So how exactly do you go about creating the next stage in soccer management games? Well, for starters you add loads more options, but this time around you make them... hey... optional. Casson emphasised that, "Players also want to be able to switch

items off. Choose which elements they're not interested in."

There's a lot more depth to *Premier Manager 97*. You can design the stadium, look for sponsors, work on player's contracts – you name it. Casson again; "In *Premier Manager 97* we're trying to cater for both worlds – more depth than ever before, but you can get the assistant manager to do things you don't want to do. Set him going and he could, if you were really lazy, run everything. The point is, you can set it to how you want to play it." A top new feature enables you to choose from a beginners,

advanced or campaign game. The latter sets specific objectives with your team. You might start off from year one, with a given team, objective and budget. Your task might last only one season and may have you given the worst team you can have, trying to avoid relegation!

A massive database holds statistics and features updated to the present day. All four divisions are included with accurate histories and stats for all major European players, clubs and managers, plus 1,000 player and squad photos for added realism. Best of all is the ability to watch all the action as it happens.

Build up your own ground – or pass responsibility to an assistant manager.
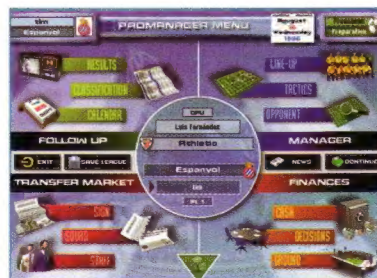
Go options crazy with the main menu on Premier Manager 97.